

EUSR/HR Lobbies EU Interior Ministers to Support Visa Facilitation

The EU Special Representative and High Representative (EUSR/HR) in BiH, Christian Schwarz-Schilling, will tomorrow take part in a meeting of EU Interior Ministers in Vienna . The meeting, which will address the role of internal security in relations between the EU and its neighbours, will cover illegal immigration, trafficking, terrorism and organised crime.

The High Representative will emphasise to the European Interior Ministers that there has been substantive progress in BiH, highlighting the fact that;

- the State Border Service now covers all BiH border crossings,
- SIPA is operational,
- secure identity cards have been introduced for foreign citizens with permanent residence in BiH,
- a review of naturalized citizens has been undertaken, and
- a centralised information system for the control of visa issuance has been set up.

BiH's success in tackling illegal immigration is evident from figures showing a significant rise in the prevention of illegal entry into the country.

Furthermore, BiH's judiciary has undergone significant reform;

political interference is being eliminated allowing for successful, high profile prosecutions against key organized crime figures and high-ranking politicians.

The EUSR/HR will also emphasise that BiH, now making substantial progress in European integration, is beginning to apply the principle of ownership and, as a result, the EU needs to offer its full support. The EUSR/HR will call on EU Interior Ministers to take concrete steps towards easing visa requirements for specific target groups, including businesspeople, students and scientists.

The EUSR/HR will make it clear that current visa restrictions limit BiH's capacity to consolidate and accelerate the economic development that is a prerequisite of stability and democracy and a sustainable future. The facilitation of business travel is a prerequisite for successful economic integration.

He will also argue that students and teachers, the key to a brighter future for BiH, should be able to travel in Europe more easily, to be able to compete alongside their future European partners.

The EUSR/HR will express his concern over last week's announcement that fees paid for EU visas are to be increased after 2007. He will point to the disproportionate burden which this fee represents, amounting for many citizens of BiH to half a month's salary.

The EUSR/HR will say that the EU must send a more positive signal to the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina.